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A GERMAN "INTELLECTUAL" UNDER THE NAZIS

The story of what happened to the large number of liberal humanists among German intellectuals during the Nazi decade has not yet been thoroughly explored. In search of light on this subject we went to see Elisabeth MARGUTH in BAD NAUHEIM, a highly intellectual woman with an interesting cosmopolitan background and command of several foreign languages. What happened to Elisabeth may be indicative of what happened to many such German intellectuals under the sustained pressure of Nazi ideas in a nazified intellectual atmosphere. There was reason to suppose that Elisabeth was among those who remained aloof from the Nazi ideology, even if like so many others she compromised with its institutions. Paradoxically, the situation seems to have been the reverse. She never joined any of the Nazi organizations, according to her own testimony, but quite clearly she accepted many of the basic tenets of the Nazi faith.

The MARGUTH Family : Cosmopolitans At Home

Elisabeth was born in DARMSTADT in 1916. Her father was a pastor in the Evangelical church, and her mother a devoted follower of both husband and pastorate. The family always had broad cosmopolitan interests and outlook. All three had travelled abroad and spoke both English and French (even at home, for practice). The females of the family were very musical and their cabinet was always filled with French, Spanish, English and Russian piano scores. Pastor MARGUTH used to read the great Protestant journals from all lands.

Pastor MARGUTH was always a "vigorous opponent" of the Nazis, by which phrase Elisabeth means that he never used the pulpit to expound items from the Nazi guidance-of-the-week, and in private conversations always attacked the Nazi attitude toward the church. Elisabeth admitted that the Protestant church suffered least under the Nazis, since priority on the Nazi black list went first to the Jewish and second to the Catholic churches. Nevertheless, she explains, many of the pressures applied to the Catholic church affected the Evangelical church as well, e.g. the insistence of local Nazi leaders that youth meetings and other Party functions be held on Sunday morning, which prevented attendance at all churches equally. The MARGUTH family, she maintains, saw from the start the scope of the Nazi threat to religion and all of them were quite outspoken against the earliest organized attacks on the Jews and Jewish places of worship. She admits that many Germans did not consider anti-semitism as a potential threat to their own churches and admits further that her own family saw the necessity of attacking Nazism on a broader political scale in order adequately to cope with its measures against organized religion. But it was "impossible to do anything" on such a scale. Pastor MARGUTH died in 1937, anti-Nazi to the last.

Frau MARGUTH vowed to continue his work as defender of the church against the new paganism and in 1942 decided that the only remaining modus operandi was to join the Nazi Party and "bore from within". Frau MARGUTH's boring instruments were probably not strong or sharp enough, for Elisabeth says she got nowhere at all as an inside agent.

Elisabeth Becomes a Traveller and Polyglot

In 1934, at the age of 18, Elisabeth, at the instance chiefly of her strongly anti-Nazi father, began to travel and study abroad. She went first to MADRID where she studied at the University until 1936, when she took her examinations in English, French and Spanish. Between 1936 and 1938 she continued her language studies at the University of MARBURG, the famous old center of German Protestant theology which seems to have been pretty

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thoroughly nazified by that date. During the four months of July/October 1938 Elisabeth lived in London with a "very nice but not very intellectual" family named DOWERTHY on Townsend Avenue. Her purpose was mainly to improve her command of spoken English. She spent the next four months, until January 1939, at the University of BRESLAU. At this point Pastor MARGUTH died, and Elisabeth discontinued her roamings in order to stay at home with mother.

Elisabeth and her Frenchman : "This" Overcomes Desire

We found it very difficult to draw a bead on Elisabeth's real beliefs until we asked whether she were married, or engaged, or in love (a routine question designed to elicit information about ties of civilians with dead, missing, or still-fighting German soldiers). Elisabeth then told the story of her great love, which she herself considers in the dual light of a tragic personal history and an ironical commentary on "our times" (by which she means the Nazi decade in Germany).

During her travels to and from MADRID and LONDON, Elisabeth spent many odd weeks and months in PARIS and in the smaller towns of France. In the Summer of 1938 she stopped for the day at LA ROCHELLE, met René LEFEVRE, and stayed a month. They became engaged in 1939.

Right from the start Elisabeth's engagement to René caused her pain. Friends at the University thought it eccentric of her to carry on with a Frenchman "at such a time". War was imminent and shortly after their engagement a state of war between France and Germany actually existed. At this point their neighbors, "even those who were not so Nazi", considered it singularly inappropriate that she should be engaged to an enemy national. Through all this, however, Elisabeth, remembering the month in LA ROCHELLE, kept her plighted troth.

René was called up by the French Army in which he held a Lieutenant's commission, and within several months was a prisoner of war. Throughout this period, and for the next two years, they maintained a fairly regular correspondence. However, it was not until June 1943, when René was moved to a P/W cage in LEIPZIG, that Elisabeth was able to visit him personally. Tortured in spirit by the persistent nagging of neighbors and by her own increasingly strengthened sense of German duty, Elisabeth told René that they must end their engagement. They continued to correspond until August 1944, however, when René broke out of prison and escaped to France. At that time the Gestapo forbid further correspondence between them. She has not heard from him since then, nor does she ever expect to again.

How Elisabeth Woke Up Her Mind : - "Die Entwicklung"

After Elisabeth had finished her tale, which she told in a nervous and very strained manner, this interrogator asked her : "But did it never occur to you that you might go to France, marry René as he had requested, and live happily ever after in LA ROCHELLE which you seem to love so well ?" Elisabeth replied that the question had several times crossed her mind but that, particularly since the war, she had not been able to picture herself as anything other than a German living in Germany. This realization grew stronger and stronger within her until 1943, when she broke the engagement.

In amplifying this statement Elisabeth gave the show away. Despite the "humanist" tradition of her family; despite the parental fight against Nazi persecution of organized religion; despite her own earlier cosmopolitan background and tastes - despite all this conditioning toward a non-Nazi Weltanschauung, the sustained pressure during 6 years of Germany at war has gradually edged Elisabeth over to the side of Nazism. She asserted frequently during the interview that she considers the racial theory to be "quatsch" (nonsense) which was used for political ends.

Too, she does not think that Germans are necessarily superior to all other peoples.

How, then, does she explain her "inability" to marry Rene and live in France? Her first response was "One doesn't desert one's country in time of war". But she herself seemed to feel that this was an inadequate statement of her case. Elisabeth struggled to recall her internal "Entwicklung seit des Krieg" (development since the war). At some crucial point she found herself convinced that marriage between a German girl and a Frenchman would be a violation of "die gesunde Volksempfindung" (the healthy sense of folk-hood).

She stopped, momentarily embarrassed that for an explanation of the most important decision of her life, she should have to fall back upon a favorite stock phrase of HITLER's. But she recovered quickly with: "Still, on this point I think HITLER was right". And she went on to explain her present views:

- (1) That each country has its own "Geist"; that Germany's "Geist" is a "missionary" one, which requires greatness or temporal position to adequately contain its spiritual greatness.
- (2) That the Germans are a great people, whose sense of "Stolz" (pride) and "Ehre" (honor) derives from profound and special characteristics (e.g. "Der Deutscher ist ein Gruebler"), which deserve a great national position.
- (3) That Germany's geographical position predestines her to leadership in Europe, which she inevitably will have (the "Mitteleuropas" thesis).

#### Elisabeth and Her Future

The interrogator got the impression that a large part of Elisabeth's present ideology was an attempt to find compensation for the loss of her man. Clearly, the decision she made was not an easy one for her and she seems to recognize the personal consequences. As she herself explained, she had passed the "best years of her life" deeply in love with one man and now, at 29, she has little expectation of finding another. She has lost the flush of youth, both in her appearance and in her outlook. She has changed from an intelligent and pretty girl, speaking several languages, feeling herself at home in different countries, to an introverted German school-mistress, without either the personal love she remembers so keenly or the fervent belief which has caused her so much pain.

She has become, in fact, simply another German nationalist and proto-Nazi by inertia. She clings to her belief in the greatness of Germany largely because there is nothing else left for her to cling to. But there is no sparkle in her eyes or lilt in her voice, even when she speaks about the greatness of Germany. She considers Germany is a phoenix and that great things must inevitably grow out of the present ashes, and she says these things with firmness and conviction. But without enthusiasm.

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